

*Representative*  
**Brad Benson**

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**Committees:**

Appropriations

Criminal Justice and Corrections

*vice chairman*

Financial Institutions and Insurance

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*Representative*  
**Duane Sommers**

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**Committees:**

Government Administration

*vice chairman*

Capital Budget

Joint Committee on Pension Policy

Capitol Campus Design

## 6<sup>th</sup> District

# 1997 Session Report

**Toll-free legislative hotline:  
1-800-562-6000**

June 1997

### The most efficient session in 40 years

Dear neighbors,

The 1997 legislative session was a landmark. For the first time in 40 years, we completed our work on time. That hasn't happened in a budget-writing year since 1957. Special sessions have been the rule rather than the exception. This year, for the first time in several generations, taxpayers will not pay the extra staffing and workload costs of a special session.

At the same time, we passed major policy initiatives, including juvenile justice reform, welfare reform and property tax relief.

This letter outlines highlights of the just-completed session. Please take a moment to read through it. We welcome your views on these and any other issues. If you have concerns or views you'd like to share, or if you need help dealing with a state agency, please call or write. We'll be happy to hear from you.

Sincerely,

*Brad Benson* *Duane Sommers*

### The 1997 Legislature *What the media said . . .*

*"Pragmatism, compromise mark session"*

— Spokesman-Review, 4/28/97

*"Budget includes millions for city's wish list"*

— Spokesman-Review, 5/2/97

*"Bipartisan effort defies predictions of gridlock"*

— The News Tribune, 4/28/97

*"A legislative session to write home about"*

— Seattle Times, 4/29/97

*"Rousing success for Legislature"*

— Everett Herald, 4/28/97

*"An action-packed, productive legislative session"*

— The News Tribune, 4/28/97

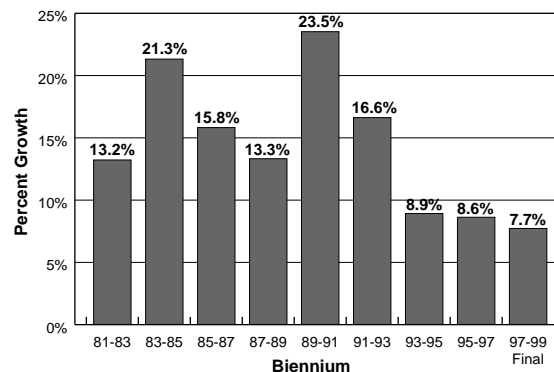
*"GOP triumph in Legislature"*

— Everett Herald, 4/28/97

## Spending less, saving more

Our budget for 1997-99 is \$19.07 billion. **This is the smallest state budget increase — 7.7 percent — since 1971.** The final budget is \$112 million below the Initiative 601 spending limit. In the three years since Republicans gained a majority in the state House of Representatives, we have consistently held spending down. And by staying below the 601 lid, we reduce spending that much more over time — a considerable savings for taxpayers.

### Spending slowdown - State budget growth since 1981



### General Fund-State Expenditures Biennial Percent Change

## Juvenile justice

We have completely reformed the way we protect our neighborhoods from young criminals. Our juvenile justice bill, which passed unanimously, enacts the most significant changes in 20 years. This is a major achievement, and a true victory for our citizens.

Here are the highlights:

**Accountability** — 16- and 17-year-olds will be prosecuted as adults in the following cases: murder, rape, drive-by shooting, first-degree robbery, first-degree child rape, first-degree burglary with a previous conviction, and any crime in which the offender used a firearm.

**New sentencing system** — The bill replaces the current sentencing “point system” with sentencing ranges based on two factors: 1) the seriousness of the current offense; and 2) the number of prior felony and misdemeanor sentences.

**Sentencing alternatives** — The measure includes several alternatives to jail or prison time, including boot camps, home detention, community service, and mandatory school attendance.

Deferred convictions will be replaced with deferred dispositions. Juveniles who agree to this form of probation after a guilty plea or a guilty verdict may substitute community supervision for incarceration. Community supervision may include treatment for drug and alcohol addiction. Juveniles must comply with all conditions of the deferral or face court-imposed jail time.

**Parental involvement** — Parents of juvenile offenders will be required to participate in court proceedings involving their children.

**Community Juvenile Accountability Act** — Grants will be made available to local governments to fund community-based juvenile accountability and intervention programs that meet specified criteria. Juveniles with three or more convictions will be referred to community-based intervention programs.

**Housing of juveniles sentenced in adult court** — Juvenile offenders under age 18 who are incarcerated in the adult system will be placed in housing units or jail cells separate from adult inmates.

**Educating juveniles sentenced to adult prison** — Juvenile offenders will be provided with opportunities to achieve either a high school diploma or GED.

## Capital budget

The 1997-99 capital construction budget is \$1.884 billion. It focuses on maintenance and preservation projects. The following local projects were approved for funding in the capital budget for 1997-99:

- **Eastern Washington University:** \$22.48 million is provided, including \$4 million for infrastructure renovations, \$2.755 million for roof replacements, \$5.35 million for minor works preservation, and \$924,000 for expanding and remodeling Monroe Hall.
- **Riverpoint Higher Education Park:** About \$1.7 million is earmarked for the design and construction of a health sciences building at this joint-centered college campus in Spokane that would allow graduate students to take courses offered by Spokane Falls Community College, Washington State University, EWU, Whitworth College and Gonzaga University. For instance, an Eastern student could take a post-graduate course through WSU, and vice versa. It's an innovative and promising idea. An additional \$8.5 million is provided to purchase a five-story office building adjacent to the Riverpoint campus to be used for faculty offices and student services.
- **Spokane Falls Community College:** Nearly \$700,000 is provided for an addition to the health sciences building.
- **Cheney Cowles Museum:** \$1.2 million is provided for design of the expansion to this museum, administered by the Eastern Washington State Historical Society. Another \$700,000 is to be spent on the design of museum exhibits.

# 1997 Session report

## Welfare reform

This year saw the culmination of a four-year struggle to reform welfare. The Legislature passed and the governor signed a bill that replaces our broken welfare system with provisions that emphasize personal responsibility and work. Welfare recipients will abide by the following conditions:

- Time limits on benefits (*five years over one's lifetime*)
- Requirements to work, search for work or perform community service
- Child-care assistance for working parents
- Job training
- Teen parents must live at home and progress toward a diploma or GED to receive benefits

We have fully funded this program, which we call the Personal Responsibility Act of 1997. Coupled with changes to the federal welfare system, we believe we will help families to free themselves from the cycle of dependency.

## Transportation

Our transportation budget provides funding for existing projects that are already underway, as well as ongoing maintenance. We also approved a performance audit of the Department of Transportation, which will give us a clearer idea of how to use our existing revenue more efficiently.

The following local improvement projects will continue to receive funding in the transportation budget:

- **U.S. Highway 2:**  
North Spokane/Division Street; stage-three work on North Spokane/Division Street (\$1.66 million).
- **Interstate 90:**  
Sprague Avenue to Argonne Road (\$12.26 million); Evergreen Road interchange (\$5.9 million); Pines Road interchange safety modification (\$100,000); Harvard Road interchange (\$200,000).
- **State Route 290:**  
Fancher Road to Sullivan Road.

**Rep. Sommers asks a question during a committee meeting**



## Tax relief

### Property tax relief:

This year, the Legislature approved \$411 million worth of tax cuts. A large portion of these cuts would go toward property tax relief. One of our first actions of the session was a vote to prevent an immediate property tax increase in January. We extended a 4.7 percent reduction in the state property tax levy through 1997.

Several other property tax relief measures were passed by the Legislature, but vetoed by the governor. In response, we have placed our proposal on the referendum ballot this fall. The voters will make the final decision on whether to approve \$220 million worth of property tax relief.

Our proposal would make the 4.7 percent state levy reduction permanent. It would limit the property tax "spikes" that result from unexpected assessment increases. Also, it would limit property tax increases. Currently, local and state governments are allowed to increase property taxes by a maximum of 6 percent each year. Our proposal would limit increases to 6 percent or the rate of inflation, whichever is lower (inflation has been running at about 3 percent).

### Small business tax relief:

This year, we voted to complete the rollback of a heavy tax increase on small businesses imposed in 1993, during the Lowry administration. The first half of the rollback was passed in 1996 and vetoed by then-Gov. Lowry. The Legislature overrode the veto. We voted for the second half of the rollback this year. The repeal takes effect in July 1998.

We also passed a tax credit for small businesses that clarifies eligibility for tax credits and makes it easier to compute the amount of tax.

## Have questions or problems? Contact our district office

To better serve you, we and Sen. Jim West have reopened our 6<sup>th</sup> District legislative office in Spokane. Feel free to stop by or give us a call if you have a question or if you're having problems dealing with a state agency and need assistance. As your state representatives, one of our duties is to help you when you run into trouble with state government. Our office is located in Room 119 of the Tapio Center (White Flag Building), off I-90. The address is Tapio Center, 104 S. Freya, Ste. 119, Spokane, WA 99202.

## Education

We promised to properly fund education, and we have kept our word. Our budget increases education funding by 7.5 percent over the biennium — an increase that stays ahead of enrollment and exceeds the inflation rate (about 2 percent). We increased funding in the following specific areas:

### SLICING UP THE BUDGET — PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Total public school spending

'95-'97 \$8.28 billion

'97-'99 \$8.90 billion

Annual per-pupil spending

'97 \$4,561 per student

'98 \$4,635 per student

'99 \$4,729 per student

### Specific increases:

Teacher salary increase

(3 percent on 7-1-97) — \$176 million

School construction — \$75 million

Technology grants — \$39 million

Instructional materials purchases — \$20 million

(average: \$458 per classroom)

We also established clear priorities in K-12 education, with an emphasis on academics, discipline and choice. We sharpened the focus on reading in the primary grades with greater teacher training and better assessments to identify students who need early assistance. We gave teachers and school districts more latitude and authority to address discipline and gang problems.

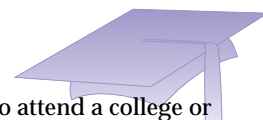
## Higher education: More enrollment slots provided

The new budget brings good news if you're planning to attend a college or university in our state. It created an additional 6,390 enrollment slots, including 4,200 for community and technical colleges. Washington State University will receive 590 more slots over the next two years, including 320 for the Pullman campus and 90 for the Spokane branch campus. There also is \$34 million provided for financial aid programs.

## Tomorrow's education at today's prices

We know that young people with college degrees have a better chance to find family-wage jobs. But working parents are understandably concerned about the rising costs of higher education. This year, we've instituted a program that allows parents to purchase future college credits at current tuition rates.

Parents can purchase up to four full years of college credits as their child matures, and then apply them toward tuition at any of our state colleges. The credits purchased would not shrink over time. What you pay for today is what you will receive tomorrow. This an excellent way to provide broad access to education for our young people. The program is still being developed, but it should be up and running by next year.



**Rep. Benson sponsored Spokane resident Micah Raymond as a legislative page this session**



**Reps. Benson and Sommers will host an Open House at their 6th District office from **4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.** on **Tuesday, June 17.****

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**1997**  
Session Report

**Rep. Brad Benson**  
**Rep. Duane Sommers**  
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